

Ministero della Salute

DIREZIONE GENERALE DELLA SANITA' PUBBLICA VETERINARIA, ALIMENTI E NUTRIZIONE

UFFICIO III e VIII

30 LUG. 2002

DR. SALLY STRATMOEN, CHIEF
EQUIVALENCE INTERNATIONAL POLICY STAFF
FOOD SAFETY AND INSPECTION SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

p.c. AMBASCIATA D'ITALIA - WASHINGTON

AMBASCIATA AMERICANA - ROMA

600.3.8/80.83/AG/ 285

SUBJECT: final reports of meat inspection system audit conducted in Italy from November 14 through December 19, 2001 and from April 15 through May 16, 2002.

Reference is made to the letters of 15 May 2002 and 31 May 2002 by which you forwarded respectively the report on the FSIS audit conducted in Italy from 15 April through 16 May 2002 and the report on the previous audit carried out from 14 November through 19 December 2001. With reference to the latter report, we do thank you for sending it to us; our reply to such report was drawn up but not forwarded to the FSIS since it was made obsolete by the audit carried out in Italy from 15 April through 16 May 2002.

As far as the 2002 audit is concerned, the relevant final report confirms that the outcome of the last audit was favorable, as already stated by the audit team leader, Dr. Sally Stratmoen, during the final meeting with the CCA (Central Competent Authority) held on 13 May 2002.

Moreover, in the same letter the USDA/FSIS informed us that the precautionary control measures on 100% of imported Italian meat products would be lifted, and that the CCA would be given back autonomy in certifying establishments approved for export to the US as of 17 May 2002. Moreover, Italy can resume a regular inspection pattern on an annual basis starting from next Fall.

Therefore we would like to express our full satisfaction for the favorable outcome of the recent audit and for the acknowledgement of the efforts made by the central and peripheral Italian health authorities over the last few months. Moreover, we have a firm will to maintain the progress made in Italy's meat inspection system and therefore to have them confirmed also in future audits.

Finally, with reference to the letter of 31 May 2002, we would like to take this opportunity to ask whether it is possible to include on FSIS' website not only the reports of the previous audits in Italy but also the sentence according to which "all deficiencies noted during the audit conducted in November - December 2001 have been corrected as evidenced by the FSIS audit conducted in April - May 2002" as stated in the referenced letter.

REMARKS ON THE REPORT AND ON THE RECOMMENDATIONS

With reference to the remarks on the establishments, the latter were given instructions by the Veterinary Services to remedy the deficiencies noted during the audit.

As to the remarks on the methods of analysis used by the Rome *Istituto Zooprofilattico Sperimentale* for generic *E. coli* and *Salmonella*, the CCA gave instructions to use only the methods required by the FSIS to test products for export to the US. Moreover, by letter ref. 600.8/80.83/AG/230 of 26 June 2002 the CCA required the National Health Institute - which is in charge of coordinating the activities of the *Istituti Zooprofilattici Sperimentali* for the microbiological and chemical analyses envisaged by the US provisions - to make a preventive assessment of any proposal to modify the above mentioned methods put forth by the IZSS and to send it to the CCA that will forward it to the FSIS.

With respect to the recommendations expressed in the report, we will adopt them as much as possible, in particular concerning the increase of veterinary staff within the Directorate General, the periodic meeting between CCA staff and regional officials to plan training activities and assure enforcement of United States requirements, the planning of additional training for regional officials and local inspector. Measures to this respect were already adopted over the last few months and on 8 April 2002, a seminar took place aimed at coordinating and harmonizing the inspections on establishments approved for export to the US; this seminar was attended by official veterinarians, veterinary

supervisors and veterinarians from the Ministry and from the Regions.

Currently the CCA is organizing training courses on GMS and SSOP procedures and on the implementation of the HACCP system aimed at the veterinary Services. These courses will take place next Fall at the Directorate General for Veterinary Public Health, Food and Nutrition.

Moreover, the heads of Office IX - Hygiene of Meat, Fish, Milk, Eggs and other Food of Animal Origin and of Office VII - Audit, Relations with Regions are foreseen to attend the Seminar that will take place in Washington in August. In this occasion a protocol for use by the CCA and FSIS to audit regional and local health units could be developed with the US authorities, as indicated in the report's "Recommendations".

With respect to the verification audits of all certified establishment by the CCA, the twice-a-year frequency advised by the FSIS will be applicable only to slaughterhouses; before the next FSIS audit foreseen next Fall, the establishments not included on last audits' program will be inspected, as well as those where deficiencies were noted, the remaining establishments on a random basis, and all the regional offices.

Finally, in order to strengthen the control on those laboratories testing samples for certified establishments, a questionnaire was drawn up in collaboration with the *Istituti Zooprofilattici Sperimentali* to gather detailed technical information on these same labs. Once the data gathered have been assessed, the laboratories will be inspected by staff of the competent IZSSs.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Yours sincerely

GENERAL DIRECTOR
DR. ROMANO MARABELLI

